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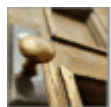
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Introduction

Introduction

Religious Affiliation identifies the religious beliefs and practices to which a person adheres or the religious group to which they belong. This variable is used to assess the religious composition of the Australian community.

Data relating to this variable are useful to religious organisations in planning their services to

members, and in social research where it is one of the variables which can aid in indicating a person's cultural background. The others are Country of Birth, and the language variables: First Language Spoken, Main Language Spoken at Home and Main Language Other Than English Spoken at Home.

The variable Religious Affiliation is one of the standard set of indicators used to measure cultural and linguistic diversity. Its implementation in administrative and service settings enables provision of relevant data to assess, measure and monitor service needs. .

Underlying Concepts

Underlying Concepts

Name of variable

The name of the variable is Religious Affiliation.

Definition of variable

Nominal definition

The variable Religious Affiliation is defined as the religious beliefs and practices to which a person adheres or the religious group to which a person belongs.

Religious Affiliation is an attribute of the counting unit 'person'.

Operational definition

Operationally, Religious Affiliation is self assessed and, therefore, measures the religion to which a person declares they have an affiliation. There is an option for people who do not consider themselves as belonging to any religious group.

Discussion of conceptual issues

Religious Affiliation is self assessed, therefore these data cannot give an objective measure of the strength of a person's affiliation with a religion and is subject to the respondent's interpretation of the question.

As it is considered a sensitive topic, answering a question about religious affiliation is optional in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) censuses and surveys and care should be exercised when interpreting estimates based on this question. For example non response rates in the 2006 Census were 11.2%, compared with 8.5% in 2011.

Classification and Coding

Classification and Coding

The standard classification and classification criteria

Religious Affiliation data in Australia is collected, aggregated and disseminated using the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) (cat no. 1266.0).

Three classification criteria are used to form the categories of the classification:

- similar religious beliefs
- similar religious practices
- cultural heritage.

The term 'religious group' is used in the ASCRG to describe groups of religions, separately identified religions, and subsets of religions such as religious denominations, administrative and organisational groupings, groups of churches, individual churches, and breakaway groups. They are described in the classification as religious groups in that each is comprised of a group of people who share common religious beliefs and practices, or belong to organisations that are unified by a common religious theme.

The ASCRG has a three level hierarchical structure.

The second level of the classification comprises 32 'narrow groups'. Narrow groups comprise between one and 14 religious groups which are similar in terms of the classification criteria.

The third and most detailed level of the classification consists of base units known as 'religious groups'. The classification consists of 115 religious groups. Some religious groups are residual categories, or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

The first and most general level of the classification comprises seven 'broad groups'. These are formed by aggregating narrow groups (and hence religious groups) which are broadly similar in terms of the classification criteria.

Broad Group 7 No Religion comprises entities which are identifiable and useful groupings which, while not satisfying the criteria of a religion, are necessary to enable the capture of the full range of responses to questions on religious affiliation.

The code structure

One, two or three, and four digit codes are assigned to the broad, narrow and religious group levels units of the classification respectively. The first digit identifies the broad group in which each religious group or narrow group is contained. The first two or three digits taken together identify the narrow group in which each religious group is contained. The four digit codes represent the religious groups.

The following examples illustrate the coding scheme:

Broad Group	2	Christianity
Narrow Group	24	Pentecostal
Religious Group	2413	Revival Centres
Broad Group	6	Other Religions
Narrow Group	605	Chinese Religions
Religious Group	6053	Taoism

Residual categories and codes

In each broad and narrow group a four digit code, ending in the digits '99' or '9', is reserved as a residual or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) category.

Further details regarding the residual categories and codes used when coding religious affiliation data can be found in the ASCRG (cat. no. 1266.0).

Supplementary codes

Supplementary codes are not part of the classification structure. They exist for operational reasons only, and no data would be coded to them if sufficiently detailed responses were obtained in all instances. They are used to process inadequately described responses in statistical collections. The codes are of three types:

- 'Not further defined' (nfd) codes, ending in zero, used to code responses which cannot be coded to the religious group level of the classification but which can be coded to either the narrow or broad group levels of the classification.
- Operational codes, commencing with '000', used to code 'inadequately described' responses. These responses present particular problems as they cannot be allocated a religious group, narrow group or broad group code within the classification structure.
- Operational codes, consisting of a broad group and a religious group level code, may be used if there is insufficient information available to attribute a religious group to any particular narrow group. Currently this type of operational code is only used to code '2001' 'Apostolic Church, so described', as the response 'Apostolic Church' lacks sufficient information to code it to an appropriate narrow group.

Scope of the variable

The variable Religious Affiliation applies to all persons.

Application of the classification to other variables

The Religious Affiliation classification is not applicable to any other variable.

Coding procedures and coding indexes

Responses to the Religious Affiliation question are coded to the ASCRG (cat. no. 1266.0) and the supplementary codes. Each religion response is matched with an entry in the ASCRG to determine the correct code.

The coding index has been developed to assist in the implementation and use of the ASCRG and should be used when coding responses to questions relating to Religious

Affiliation. It contains a comprehensive list of the most probable responses to questions relating to religious groups and their correct classification codes. Use of the coding index enables responses to be coded accurately to the appropriate category of the classification.

Further details regarding the classification and coding of religious affiliation data can be found in the ASCRG (cat. no. 1266.0).

Copies of the coding index can be found by accessing the data cube attached to the ASCRG publication (cat. no. 1266.0) on the ABS website (www.abs.gov.au).

Collection Methods

Collection Methods

Standard question module

There are four alternatives for the standard question module for Religious Affiliation. The option used will depend on collection needs, including form space and cost considerations.

- Alternative one: a set of tick boxes and an 'Other - please specify' response category for writing a religion not specified in the tick box list
- Alternative two: an alternative set of tick boxes and an 'Other - please specify' response category for writing a religion not specified in the tick box list, for use in collections from indigenous communities
- Alternative three: space for a write-in response and a tick box for 'No religion'.
- Alternative four: space for a write-in response and a tick box for 'No religion', for use in collections from indigenous communities

Alternatives three and four are more compact but will incur additional coding costs to process the written responses.

Alternative one

Q. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Judaism, Humanism or Taoism.
If no religion, mark the last box.

Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anglican (Church of England)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uniting Church	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presbyterian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buddhism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Islam	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Greek Orthodox ☐
- Baptist ☐
- Hinduism ☐
- Other - please specify:
- No religion ☐

Alternative two

Q. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Salvation Army, Brethren, Judaism, or Humanism.
If no religion, mark the last box.

- Traditional Beliefs ☐
- Anglican (Church of England) ☐
- Catholic ☐
- Uniting Church ☐
- Lutheran ☐
- Baptist ☐
- Aboriginal Evangelical Missions ☐
- Other - please specify:
- No religion ☐

Alternative three

Q1. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Judaism, Humanism, Islam, Greek Orthodox, Baptist, or Anglican (Church of England).

Please write in your religion or mark the box if no religion.

.
No religion ☐

Alternative four

Q1. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Traditional Beliefs, Anglican (Church of England), Catholic, Uniting Church, Lutheran, or Baptist.

Please write in your religion or mark the box if no religion.

.
No religion ☐

Answering a question about Religious Affiliation is optional in ABS censuses and surveys as it is considered a sensitive topic. Section 14 (2) of the Census and Statistics Act 1905, which addresses the issue of refusal or failure to answer questions, states that this 'does not apply in relation to a refusal or failure by a person to answer a question, or supply particulars, relating to the person's religious beliefs.' ABS surveys must clearly state that answering the question is optional.

To improve data quality, it is important to advise respondents that if they do not identify with a religion, they should still answer the question by marking the 'No religion' tick box.

The tick box lists for alternatives one and two of the question module include religious groups based on their statistical significance in the Australian context. The lists are designed for efficiency and economy when coding responses. The lists imply no view by the ABS of the relative importance of any religious group or groups. The lists are reviewed when data indicate that different religious groups have been more or less frequently reported in the ABS Census and surveys.

The tick box lists in alternatives one and two can be extended where circumstances enable longer lists, consistent with the ASCRG, to be displayed, such as in electronic collection drop down lists. Similarly, if there are space constraints on paper forms, the tick box lists can be truncated. The 'No religion' tick box should always be included

'Other - please specify' is included to enable respondents whose religious group is not listed to record their religious affiliation in the space provided.

Alternatives three and four of the question module can be used when detailed religious affiliation data is required from a survey instrument which has space constraints. Additional coding costs may be incurred since each response will need to be matched to an entry in the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) (cat. no. 1266.0) coding index.

Each alternative to the question module may be accompanied by a brief explanatory note about why Religious Affiliation is collected and detailed instructions about how to answer the question. The explanatory note can be included with the chosen question module or in supplementary documentation. The recommended text for the explanatory note is in Appendix A .

Standard input categories

The standard input categories are the same as the categories of the ASCRG (cat. no. 1266.0). For operational reasons, supplementary codes also exist to enable inadequately described responses to be coded.

Output

Output

Standard output categories

The use of the standard classification will enhance data analysis and comparability. The hierarchical structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) (cat. no. 1266.0) enables the flexibility to output statistics at the level of the classification which best suits user requirements. Data can be presented at the broad group, narrow group, and/or base religious group level.

Wherever possible, data should be captured, classified and stored at the base level of the classification. Collecting and storing data at the most detailed level of the classification

- allows the greatest flexibility for the output of data

- enables more detailed and complex analysis
- facilitates comparisons with previous data
- assists to preserve information that may prove historically useful
- facilitates comparisons with data from alternative sources, some of which may have been collected using different classifications.

However, constraints can affect the collection and dissemination of statistical data. For example, although confidentiality or standard errors may preclude collection or output of data at the lower levels of the classification, data can be collected and aggregated to the narrow or broad group levels.

When appropriate, particular religious groups within a narrow group could be presented separately while other religious groups within that narrow group could be aggregated. (For example, the third level religious group Taoism could be separately identified as an output category within the Narrow Group 'Chinese Religions', the remaining religious groups, in this Narrow Group could then be aggregated as an 'Other Chinese Religions' category). This concept can be applied to highlight narrow groups within a broad group.

The following is an example of standard output categories. (All seven broad groups of the ASCRG, with a small sample of the 32 narrow and 115 religious groups are reflected in this example).

Buddhism

Christianity

Anglican

Baptist

Catholic

Presbyterian and Reformed

Presbyterian

Reformed

Free reformed

Hinduism

Islam

Judaism

Other Religions

Australian Aboriginal Traditional Religions

Baha'i

Chinese Religions

Ancestor Veneration

Confucianism

Taoism

Chinese Religions, nec

No Religion

Agnosticism

Atheism

Humanism

Rationalism

Supporting variables

Religious Affiliation requires no supporting variables.

Measurement Issues

Measurement Issues & Related Classifications

Measurement issues

No specific measurement issues apply to the variable Religious Affiliation.

The normal constraints affecting statistical collections, such as problems with confidentiality or standard errors may preclude the collection or output of data for some of the categories at the lower levels of the classification.

Related classifications

Not applicable.

Contact information

The Religious Affiliation statistical standard has been produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Enquiries should be directed to standards@abs.gov.au.

Appendix A - Explanatory Script

Appendix A - Explanatory Script

This document provides a brief explanatory note about why Religious Affiliation is collected and detailed instructions about how to answer the question. Part or all of the explanatory note and instructions can be included with the chosen question module or in supplementary documentation.

RELIGION QUESTION - WHY IS IT ASKED?

Data collected on religious affiliation informs religious organisations about how many people of their religious group there are in different parts of Australia.

The data is used by religious organisations to assess the need for religiously based schools, hospitals, community services and homes for the elderly. The data is also used to assist researchers from secular and non secular universities and to assist governments at all levels to make appropriate policy for the people of Australia.

RELIGION QUESTION - HOW TO ANSWER

If alternatives one or two of the question module are used in the survey instrument, the

following optional instructions may be added to the question module or included in supplementary documentation:

If a person's religion is an Eastern Catholic religion such as Maronite Catholic, Melkite Catholic or Ukrainian Catholic, record the name of the religion in the space adjacent 'Other - please specify'.

People who have non-theistic religious beliefs or other life philosophies should record their response in the space adjacent 'Other - please specify'.

If a person identifies with no religion at all, mark the 'No religion' box.

Appendix B - References

Appendix B - References

- Census Dictionary, 2011 (cat. no. 2901.0)
- Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, 2011 (cat no. 1266.0)
- Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, Second Edition, 2005 (cat. no. 1266.0)
- Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity, 1999 (cat no. 1289.0)
- Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, 1996 (cat. no. 1266.0)

About this Release

Religious Affiliation identifies the religious beliefs and practices to which a person adheres, or the religious group to which they belong. Religious Affiliation is used to assess the religious composition of the Australian population. It can be used by ABS collections and other agencies which collect and/or disseminate data for statistical and administrative purposes.

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